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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000495

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS, PRM, AND G/TIP -- SALLY NEUMANN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/12/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [SMIG](#) [KCRM](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: TWO BURMESE ALLEGE TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCE AT
MALAYSIA-THAI BORDER

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 399 -- RIOT AT IMMIGRATION CENTER

¶1. (C) Summary: Two Burmese refugees met with us and alleged that low-level Malaysian Immigration officials sold and delivered them into the custody of armed Thai nationals at the Thai-Malaysian border. UNHCR has received similar firsthand reports from other refugees. On June 6, we shared information and expressed our concerns over the reports with Malaysia's Immigration Enforcement Director, who said his office would investigate the matter. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Emboffs met with two Burmese refugees, Thang Kwawm Pau and Sai Mao Oo, who reported that they had returned to Malaysia after being transported and sold by low-level Malaysian Immigration officials to Thai agents at the Malaysia-Thai border. Malaysian authorities reportedly detained both men during raids in late March and sent them to the Lenggeng Immigration Detention Center. According to Thang and Sai, Immigration officials transported the two men, together with other Burmese refugees, in an Immigration Department bus to the border on or about April 23, following a disturbance at the detention center on April 21 (reftel). Upon reaching the border, an Immigration officer reportedly escorted the detainees to a river marking the Thai-Malaysian border. (Note: Neither refugee could tell us the exact location along the border. End note.) At the river, at night and away from any official border crossing, the Immigration officer reportedly used a small boat to transfer groups of detainees across to the Thai side. Armed Thai nationals, not Thai officials, greeted the group. Thang and Sai report the Thai nationals paid the escorting Immigration officer 700 ringgit (about \$220) for each detainee.

¶3. (SBU) The Thai nationals allegedly told the victims that for a 1,900 ringgit fee (about \$600) for adults or 1000 ringgit (about \$316) for children, they would be taken back into Malaysia. They provided a cell phone for the detained group to call someone who could get the money demanded and arrange payment of the ransom. The two Burmese refugees said they were able to raise the required fee to return to Malaysia. They told us the traffickers reportedly sold deported Burmese who unable to pay the ransom to third parties on the Thai side. Thang and Sai said they believed the traffickers sold men to work on Thai fishing boats, women to work in hotels and brothels for sexual exploitation, and older children to work as domestics. At least one man in the group sold to the traffickers claimed he recently escaped from a Thai fishing boat while anchored in a Malaysian port. The man stated he was a captive on a Thai fishing boat for almost three years before he managed to escape. (Note: Multiple sources provide similar information of Thai traffickers providing labor to the Thai fishing industry. End note.) The men claimed the traffickers used firearms to control the victims and threaten them with death, sometimes holding pistols to the head of a person to press home the threat. The Thai nationals transferred those persons able to pay the ransom back into Malaysia, again using night to conceal their activities.

¶4. (C) We shared the refugees' accounts with UNHCR representatives. UNHCR also had heard allegations of trafficking of refugees at the Thai-Malaysia border. The UNHCR obtained information on suspected traffickers, including bank accounts and cell phone numbers from refugees and other sources they interviewed. (Note: We are attempting to get copies of the UNHCR information.) Acting UNHCR Representative Henrik Nordentoft said he had raised relevant press reports to the attention of Director-General of Immigration Wahid bin Mohamad, and Nordentoft believed Wahid would have his Department investigate. Nordentoft also said both UNHCR and UNICEF were willing to assist GOM officials with appropriate TIP training.

¶5. (C) On June 6, poloff spoke with Head of Immigration Enforcement Ishak Mohamad and relayed accounts that low-level Immigration officials allegedly were involved in the trafficking of Burmese refugees from immigrations detention centers, using official vehicles, to the Thai border. Ishak expressed concern about the allegations and wanted more details. He said that he would look into the matter and press for action against any Immigration officials found implicated in such crimes.

¶6. (C) Comment: Post will share with Malaysian authorities any further information on the alleged involvement of Immigration officials in human trafficking at the Malaysia-Thai border. We will also continue to urge investigation of these reports and action to deal with any confirmed cases. We will keep the Department apprised of developments.

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KEITH